

NEW ORLEANS POLITICS

BOLD clout on Council returns

**ALSO: Favorable attention;
Drawing the curtain**

**By Bruce Egger
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Staff writers

BOLD is back in business, and it appears that state Rep. Karen Carter could be among the immediate beneficiaries.

Although the Central City political group never really went belly-up, its luster certainly dimmed after longtime leader and former City Councilman Jim Singleton was stripped of

much of his authority at City Hall in 2000. Two years later, the organization lost its 24-year hold on the District B council seat when Renee Gill Pratt, an ally of BOLD's longtime rival, U.S. Rep. William Jefferson, won the post.

But now power on the council has shifted again. Gill Pratt was ousted two months ago, and BOLD's new standard-bearer, Oliver Thomas, grabbed the chairmanship of the powerful Utility Committee, which decides who gets what are by far the most lucrative contracts the council doles out. This year alone, the lawyers, economists

and accountants who advise the council on regulating Entergy New Orleans are in line to get nearly \$6 million.

In December 2000, two months after Eddie Sapir supplanted Singleton as Utility Committee chairman, the committee ended the \$600,000 annual contract that BOLD leader and former Assessor Ken Carter's law firm, Carter & Cates, had held for several years as part of the team of utility advisers.

Another local law firm, Wilkerson and Henry, kept its con-

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TRO

Reins of Utility panel shift

BOLD, from B-1

tract, which currently amounts to \$600,000 a year. Karen Carter, Ken Carter's daughter, said Friday that she recently forged a business relationship with the Wilkerson firm and has begun working with managing partner Jeff Wilkerson on Entergy regulation and other issues.

Karen Carter said she became "of counsel" to the Wilkerson firm about two months ago, or shortly after Thomas won easy re-election to his at-large seat and it began to look likely he would take over the Utility Committee. But Carter said there was no connection between events at City Hall and her decision to sign on with the firm.

Instead, she said, she decided that after practicing law on her own for the past two years, in post-Katrina New Orleans "it was in my best interests as a professional to work with a firm again." She said she formerly worked with the Phelps, Dunbar firm and before that was involved in utilities regulatory issues for several years as a member of her father's firm.

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ANOTHER BOLD MOVE: Another longtime BOLD leader, Dryades YMCA Executive Director Doug Evans, also came in for some favorable attention from the council this week.

The Governmental Affairs Committee voted to recommend to the full council that Evans retain his seat on the Aviation Board for another five-year term. Aviation Board members are not paid, but besides overseeing the operations of Armstrong International Airport, the board helps decide who gets numerous big-dollar contracts the airport awards.

Councilwoman Stacy Head, who now holds the District B seat formerly held by Gill Pratt and before that by Singleton and Thomas, noted that although her name was on the motion to approve Evans' renomination, that's because he lives in her district. She said the nomination came from Mayor Ray Nagin, but that she had reviewed

Evans' qualifications and recommended his approval.

Evans was linked recently to former New Orleans business executive Gilbert Jackson, once a major political fund-raiser at the local level, who last month was sentenced to 27 months in federal prison for income tax evasion.

In a plea with prosecutors, Jackson admitted to taking \$19,500 in unreported income from a "lobbyist" representing a private firm that was seeking a management contract from the Sewerage & Water Board. At the time, Jackson's employer, the engineering firm Camp Dresser & McKee, was advising the board on how to privatize its operations, creating a conflict of interest.

Court documents have identified the lobbyist as Evans. Officials from the firm Evans was representing, Severn Trent, have said they did not know Evans was paying Jackson. Evans has not been charged with wrongdoing.

The timing of the vote to endorse Evans' renomination was curious, coming right after the committee held a two-hour hearing on how to improve governmental ethics by creating a city inspector general's office and an ethics review board.

During the discussion, several council members were outspoken in saying the city needs to improve the public's confidence in its government and to reassure the rest of the nation that billions of dollars in post-Katrina federal aid will be spent honestly and efficiently.

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NOT READY TO VOTE: Registrar of Voters Louis Keller exited quietly Friday, drawing the curtain on a 28-year City Hall career.

Keller, who will celebrate his 75th birthday in September, announced his retirement with little fanfare two weeks ago, saying he felt the time had come to move on.

When he was appointed to the post by the City Council in 1988, Keller had served as deputy registrar for 10 years. Over his tenure, he has established a reputation as a hard-working, gen-

tlemanly public servant.

But the post-Katrina diaspora saddled the registrar's office with unprecedented burdens as thousands of displaced voters struggled to participate in the spring municipal elections by casting early ballots in person and by mail.

The drastically increased workload prompted Secretary of State Al Ater to dispatch nearly two dozen staffers from Baton Rouge to assist with the April primary and May runoff.

But Ater spokeswoman Jennifer Marusak said that level of aid to New Orleans won't be possible for statewide elections in September, November and December, when the secretary of state will be helping the devastated parishes of St. Bernard and Plaquemines stage their first post-Katrina elections.

For that reason, Marusak said, Ater has been stressing to City Council members how important it is to find a top-notch replacement for Keller. "It's no secret that the new registrar will have to hit the ground running and hit it quickly," Marusak said.

City Hall observers expect the job, which comes with an annual salary of \$81,000 and a payroll of more than a dozen employees, to attract multiple applicants.

But as of Friday, only one person, Keller's chief deputy, Bobby Wilson, had formally applied.

The only other name to surface so far is Sandra Wilson, an employee of the secretary of state's office who formerly worked for 28 years as a teacher and principal in the city's public school system. Sandra Wilson, who is not related to Bobby Wilson, could not be reached for comment Friday.

Council President Thomas said he doesn't expect the council to make a hasty decision on filling the post. He said the process could take several weeks. Until an appointment is made, Bobby Wilson will serve as acting registrar.

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